

Project IC: PM's cabinet committee not new, says PBS leader
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A top Sabah politician said the high-powered cabinet committee on illegal immigrants announced on Saturday by Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi is not new as such committees had been set up before.
MCPX

In a statement issued from Kota Kinabalu yesterday, Parti Bersatu Sabah supreme council member Dr Chong Eng Leong (left) went as far as describing the announcement as another "lip service".

suhakam roundtable kk sabah 020806 dr chong eng leong According to Chong, the prime minister has forgotten what he had said earlier before announcing the establishment of the new committee during an official visit to the state over the weekend.

"Isn't this committee is the same as the one announced in 2000, chaired by him when he was the then deputy PM?

"And then announced again in 2006 and chaired by the present deputy PM?" he questioned.

He also recalled that there wasn't any meeting held by the committee since its formation in 2000, except in 2006 when it decided to form 'a special court' to deal with the illegal immigrants.

The court, he noted, have yet to hear its first case.

On Saturday, Abdullah announced the formation of a cabinet committee on illegal immigrants, which will be chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, to discuss and solve the perennial illegal immigrants' problem in the state.

The committee, which will also include several Sabah leaders, would seek solutions to the problem, particularly foreigners holding the 'IMM13' - a document in lieu of passport issued by the Immigration Department to Filipino refugees which permits them to remain in Sabah.

Project IC beneficiaries

Responding to this, Chong also wanted to know as to why the committee would only specifically look into foreigners holding the IMM13 document.

identity card sabah fiasco He said that there were many illegal immigrants with Malaysian identity cards - known as Project IC beneficiaries - whose number plus their children have already reached 600,000.

He said that these new citizens were also claiming to be bumiputera and at least 70,000 of them were registered on Sabah electoral rolls.

"He (Abdullah) conveniently does not want to deal with Project IC. He seems not wanting to protect Sabah security and the sovereignty of Malaysia," he charged.

In recent weeks, many Sabah politicians have called upon the federal government to pay serious attention to the problems of illegal immigrants in the state, some even recommending with setting up of a royal commission to look into the matter.

However, Abdullah announced the establishment of the cabinet committee.

Support blocked

While Chong has been critical of the federal government's attitude in solving this problem, his party PBS - a coalition member of the ruling BN which is headed by Abdullah - has been generally silent in pushing the federal government into doing something drastic.

Previously Chong has claimed that his party's deputy president Maximus Ongkili's efforts in pushing for solutions to the illegal immigrant problem after becoming a federal minister in 2004 as a disappointment.

Chong had said that Maximus had blocked him from representing PBS to present memos on illegal immigrant papers to Suhakam and also the Parliamentary Select Committee on Unity between 2004 and 2006.

And he accused his deputy president of trying to stop Sabah MPs from voting for the royal commission of inquiry motion which was disallowed by Deputy Speaker Ronald Kiandee recently.

PBS, headed by Joseph Pairin Kitingan, has three members of parliament.

Committee has no legal power

Meanwhile, Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah (PBRS) also has expressed doubt over the effectiveness of the high-powered cabinet committee on illegal immigrants.

Joseph KurupThe party's president Joseph Kurup explained that this was due to the fact that the committee was not constituted through the provisions of law.

"This being the case, it will not have any legal power to compel anybody to come forward to give information or evidence. It will have no power to prosecute anybody who lies in the course of giving evidence. Obviously it will not achieve its purpose," he said.

He said the formation of such a committee has given the people of Sabah a perception that it was just an "eyewash".

He added that the people of Sabah had been begging the federal government to resolve the issues for many decades but, the problem continued to exist.

"The illegal immigrants issue in Sabah which is getting worse by day is a real threat to national security and our sovereignty that nothing short of a royal commission of inquiry would be able to resolve the issue.

What is the problem of setting up a royal commission of inquiry?" he asked.

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